Alva's Unbridled Rage and the Steam of Revolution

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Alva's Unbridled Rage and the Steam of Revolution

by lefemmerouge

Summary

As Alva prepares for war against Avalor, the workers of Steamland are not as keen on his idea. They rise up and protest in the streets of the city in a show of force. Will Alva put up with this? Or will he see them as a hindrance and crush them, seeing them as a "threat" to his drive for war? Whatever the choice he makes, his actions will have ripple effects on those around him, including Mr. Dickens, his loyal assistant, Lady Bowmore, a police lieutenant, and Mx. Lawlor, the non-binary archivist, who has a secret life below the city itself…

Notes

I took some time to write this story, as I struggled a little with writers block here, but I got through it, especially after figuring out how to end this story. I know this story is relatively short, but I think it sets the stage for the next story, where the fleet heads to Avalor for the invasion. So, that's coming. Oh, and as a reminder, Mx. Lawlor uses they/them pronouns and is non-binary, which is why those pronouns are used in this story. Also, SAM means Steamland Archives and Museum. I also came up with a first name for Lady Bowmore, even though it's not canon, and another for Mx. Lawlor, so that I could easily refer to them in the future.

As always, comments and constructive criticism are welcome and appreciated.

Update on 12/13/24: This fic has been cross-posted on Squidge World and the revised version there has been reposted here.

See the end of the work for more notes

It had been one month since Alva had made his speech calling for a war against Avalor. The laborers, machinists, and others had been on his side. They were even more anxious now and tired of their work conditions. Managers had become more restrictive with their work time and demanded workers focus on war production. Steamland had added stress of 20-hour-long days unlike other parts of the universe. Some planned to demonstrate in front of the Gunderson Steamworks Company building. They would then march through the city's center. When the clock struck 10, the bell tower rang. Workers began pouring out of the various businesses and onto the streets. In a matter of minutes, the demonstrators had stopped all traffic, bringing the city to a standstill. Alva saw this unfold from his window atop the company building. He heard chanting. He spied the banners, signs, and messages calling for stronger worker rights. In the past, he might have been sympathetic and even made concessions but did not feel that way now. At the present time, the workers were an obstacle to his imperialist ambitions.

He called Lady Bowmore into his office as he paced across the room. She entered and greeted him gracefully. Although she was not on board with his drive toward war, she still believed that he was a good person. She had faith he would change his mind, rededicating himself to improving Steamland. Alva snarled.

"So, Ms. Bowmore, I need you to scatter the crowd out there with any tools at your disposal."

She looked at him with *utter horror*. Even though she was a Steamland Police Department (SPD) lieutenant, she only patrolled the city's streets to ensure that people were following traffic rules. As such, she had never put down any worker demonstrations and even had friends in the labor movement.

She tried to reason with him. "Sir, we should negotiate with them first…if we can agree to at least, a few of their demands, *they will dissipate*. I can promise you that."

Alva laughed. He considered such an idea preposterous. "Negotiate? I will never talk with these *rabble-rousers*!"

He cleared his throat. He waved a piece of paper in the air, making an absurd claim.

"And those people out there, they are funded by the tyrant of Avalor…I can *PROVE* it!"

Bowmore moved her head from side to side. She knew he was not telling the truth.

"Peaceful protest is protected by the Steamland Charter! They have a right to be out there."

He scoffed. That legal document meant nothing to him and stood in his way.

"The charter? Ha! I am the sovereign, remember? What I say is LAW. And they are breaking *the law*."

Bowmore could stand this no longer. She took off her badge and threw it onto the floor, spitting on it.

"Fine. Then, I quit the SPD! You'll never find a lieutenant as qualified as me! I can count on that."

She exited the room and took the elevator to the ground floor, as he had expected she would. He felt relieved. He wanted *a yes person* who would not question his decisions.

At that very moment, Mr. Dickens came into his office. Like a dutiful assistant, he entered the room and bowed. Alva sat back in his chair and smiled.

"I'd like you to do something for me."

Mr. Dickens asked, "what would you like, sir?"

He got up out of his chair and pointed to the police badge on the ground. Not understanding what his boss wanted, he shrugged. Annoyed, Alva picked up the badge and handed it to Mr. Dickens.

"How would you like to be the head of the SPD?"

He did not know how to respond. He had no idea what that acronym meant. "SPD?"

Shaking his head, Alva couldn't believe how ill-informed his assistant was on such matters. Had he *not* read the daily newspapers?

"The police, you dunderhead."

Mr. Dickens understood now. He grinned. "Sure, sir. I'll do anything to please your grace."

Alva was glad. Everything had gone as he had planned. He put his arm around Mr. Dickens and walked with him to the window. He pointed outside.

"You see those people on the streets? I want you to CRUSH them."

While he would have, usually, acted in a comparable way to Lady Bowmore, he felt compelled to give in and agree. He nodded.

"Yes sir, immediately sir."

As he marched out of the room, Alva cackled. He had injected Mr. Dickens with a potion which had the effect of causing someone to have a weak will. It was a concoction he had for this occasion.

Lady Bowmore weaseled her way through the crowd and told them to flee. She warned that they would be killed or hurt by Alva if the demonstration continued. Workers scoffed.

"I may hate Gunderson, but he'll *never* break up our demonstration."

This disturbed Bowmore. She did not know what to do, so she moved out of the street and sat on the curb, despondent. The sound of propellers and steam engines filled the air. Above

were sky vehicles and other airships. A message blared out of the huge zeppelin above, catching the workers by disbelief:

"Please disperse at once, by order of the SPD. Go home."

Those on the streets were defiant, shouting at the airships, often with obscenities. A few left but most remained. Due to the crowd's tumultuous nature, he knew that he could justify what would come next. He told the now-easily-influenced Mr. Dickens to start *Operation Hot N' Steamy*. Canisters dropped from the sky. At first, the workers paid them no mind. Then, pressurized hot steam came out, scalding those nearby and creating a thick fog of sorts. Disoriented, many walked aimlessly around the city's streets. Out of the steam-induced fog came scores of light bulb-headed robots, which grabbed people and made them disappear. Others were scattered by steam-powered flashbang grenades. In the middle of the pandemonium, there were explosions in parts of the city, causing more terror. Although the protest had ended on uncertain terms, Alva, who believed the demonstration was a riot, cheered. His strong-armed methods had been a success. He began speaking to the beleaguered citizens:

"Fellow Steamlandians, as you probably know, scores of people went onto the streets of our great city and demonstrated. We are in a war and security is paramount. My intelligence says those rapscallions were supported by the tyrant of Avalor…I can you assure of that, *100 percent*…so, they had to be arrested and broken apart…we had no choice but to restore order."

The message ended ambiguously. Scores of people were completely convinced by his rhetoric and did not dare question it. Others were skeptical. Those arrested by the robots were thrown into cages and holding pens, hastily assembled in warehouses across the city. None of them believed anything that Alva said. Morale among those in custody was low. Some even believed that the cause was lost and that they would never recover from this defeat.

Bowmore sighed as she walked through the streets, seeing the robots dragging demonstrators away. She felt helpless and powerless. Even so, she considered her life worth living and vowed to travel to the Kingdom of Dreamland. She planned to leave Steamland for good, to meet the one person she had loved in the past, a woman named Bean. Before she could begin the first phase of this plan, two ropes wrapped around her ankles. She tried to break free. It was no use. A person with an obscured face came from behind her and blew powder into her face. Woozy, she swayed back and forth, then fell to the ground. The person untied the ropes, opened the drain cover, and carried her down into the sewer pipe below, climbing down the rope. She would soon meet people who would change her life in many ways.

She slowly opened her eyes to the electric lamp shaped like a rocket ship that lit her room. As she got up, a person sitting in a wicker chair next to her makeshift bed exclaimed.

"Finally, you're up. We can take you to our leader…they will be excited to meet you."

This alone surprised Bowmore. She did not know many people who used pronouns apart from the usual ones used by men and women, like he, him, she, and her, even as a member of the explorer club. This could be because Steamland's high society was dominated by men.

Intrigued, she held the hand of the woman who had been tending to her needs. The dizziness from the sleeping powder had mostly subsided, but not completely.

The light bulbs flickered, lighting up the dark tunnel, and she heard the metal wheels turning. She saw people wearing a variety of outfits. Some wore dresses with sprockets throughout. Others wore fancy blouses with burgundy and light brown stripes complete with leather straps around the waist and pocket watches. Often top hats, metal eyepieces, and special glasses went with these outfits. No one wore anything revealing, at least not while they were in these tunnels because it wasn't their style. Bowmore wondered what she had gotten herself into and wondered why these people had brought her there.

One woman stepped forward and smiled. Their mahogany-colored skin shone in the light and two goggles strapped on her head. They had on a white button-down shirt, a leather belt with a gold buckle fastening her dark blue jeans, a watch on a chain, and leather gloves. A light wool top hat sat atop their head. This contrasted with their usual outfit, consisting of a top hat, coat with frills and sleeves, white gloves, and a gray skirt. They spoke in a soft voice.

"Hello, Lady Bowmore…I…we would like your help."

She was puzzled, although she *recognized* the woman as Mx. Lawlor. She knew of the archivist from her attempts to take photographs of cute women going inside and around the city. She never had enough time to say anything to them, as they shuffled into the archives, the SAM, every morning. Another woman stood next to Mx. Lawlor.

"You were…a police lieutenant, correct? Our organization needs your help, after what happened on the streets today."

Such an offer would *usually* not interest her. But, knowing that Alva had gone completely bonkers, she readily agreed. She bellowed.

"I accept and would like to be a member of your organization. *Down with the System*!"

Bowmore's declaration surprised Lawlor and the others in the unit. No one had expected she would want to join. Even so, all appreciated her support. Lawlor cleared their throat. They extended their arm and outstretched their hand.

"Welcome to LAWLOR," they said, while Bowmore shook their hand.

Another fellow revolutionary piped up, explaining the acronym. "Apart from naming it after our leader, it is also the name of our group: The **L**uminous **A**eronautical **W**ayfaring **L**egion **O**f **R**evolutionaries."

The name made little sense. Aeronauts were aircraft pilots or airship travelers, and wayfarers were foot travelers. Bowmore found out that everyone in this revolutionary cell had a code name, with their birth names dead to them. One woman added, "we accept all genders here, and people of all shapes, and sizes…all pronouns are acceptable too…it is part of who we are as an organization."

Bowmore liked to hear this. Their openness was something that attracted her even more to the group. The headquarters of LAWLOR would be a place that is surprising not because of its obvious choice but due to who Mx. Lawlor was as a person, in their usual role in the steam-powered city itself.

LAWLOR was part of a growing resistance movement to Alva's autocratic rule. Supporters called them fighters for freedom while Alva and his supporters sneered at such revolutionary activities. Day by day, LAWLOR's secret activities in the sewers of Steamland were growing. This included favorable art, pamphlets, leaflets, and other communications. Inevitably this began the creation of an underground culture of sorts, separate from the mainstream society on the surface of Steamland. At its founding, LAWLOR had committed itself to armed resistance and armed struggle, overthrowing Alva's government by any means necessary. However, currently, the organization's members only nonviolently resisted. Alva's crackdown had changed everything, leading the LAWLOR toward violent struggle as the only solution. This would mean armed self-defense, armed vigilance, guerilla warfare, and the like. The group members hoped that Bowmore would aid them in training for armed conflict.

Mx. Lawlor pointed up to the ceiling and declared "that's our headquarters, it's up there." Bowmore was confused.

In response, Lawlor shook their head. "Come on. It is the archives, obviously."

This made more sense to Bowmore. It all made sense now. She snickered and whispered in their ear softly, "you can call me Lizzy."

An excited Lawlor blushed. No one in the LAWLOR shared their personal names for security purposes in case Alva or his goons captured them. Even so, Lawlor wanted to make a connection with Lizzy so that she would feel that those in the organization were like her family. Their hope was that this would make her invested in LAWLOR and become a dedicated member.

They whispered back "it's nice to meet you, Lizzy. I'm Ellie."

They added, "call me by my name and I'll call you by yours."

As each gushed at each other, one of Ellie's lieutenants piped up. Losing time on this would not be worthwhile.

"We *need* to plan for our next move, Mx., before Alva gets the drop on us."

Ellie agreed. She led everyone to the surface, climbing up a ladder, entering one of the record rooms. A few select members followed, as did Lizzy. Out of the corner of their eye, Ellie spotted some of Alva's hated robots, Charles, Luke, and Matthew, entering the doors. Mr. Dickens, Alva's loyal assistant and the new commander of the SPD led in the robots. He snarled and shouted.

"So, who is in charge here? I need to sweep this building for *insurgents*!"

Grumbling, they gestured to everyone else to climb down the ladder and back into the tunnel. All of them did so with such ease that nary a sound could be heard. Lizzy turned the wheel, closing the surface opening. She heard Ellie mention the closure of the SAM because of public disturbances.

A brief time later, the porthole to the underground tunnel opened. Everyone had been waiting impatiently, fearing that Alva had found them and that they would be raided anytime now. Luckily, that fear had been unfounded. Ellie waved hello as she turned the wheel, closing the pothole, and coming down the ladder. Talking to fellow LAWLOR members, they revealed what Mr. Dickens thanked them for cooperation in the inspection and that the robots swept the whole facility for "insurgents." They spit on the ground in disgust, adding "I hated doing it, but I had to…for the cause."

Lizzy moved closer. She wanted to know why Ellie was doing this. "Why are you doing all this…as an archivist? I'm…not clear on that."

Clearing their throat, they explained the value of archivists. Ellie hoped it would help Lizzy understand more why they were part of LAWLOR, serving as its leader while working as head of the SAM:

"Archivists expand user access, contribute to scholarship, collaborate, have diverse collections, support lifelong learning, share knowledge, support transparency and sustainability, and are mentors *at their best*. Archivists also have a responsibility to *mitigate harm* and are *never* neutral. No archival institution or practice implemented is neutral. So, it is only right to expand this to the political realm, even if all archivists don't do this. I am a *revolutionary*. I am an archivist. Both can exist within one person and not contradict each other."

That explanation made perfect sense to Lizzy. She smiled back. She understood where Ellie was coming from, as she had an interest in becoming an explorer, even though she would never become an archivist herself. She had joined the police force, in the first place, out of the desire to help people. At the time of signing up for the SPD, she naively did not understand the police's role in society. She now knew that the police, whether consciously or unconsciously, helped maintain the gap between the haves and have-nots, the privileged over the underprivileged. She realized this from her own observations, conversations, and reading of books on the topic at the Steamland Public Library. Even so, she continued to justify her job, claiming it did not reinforce those hierarchies since she worked mainly as a traffic cop. Thinking back to this, she realized that she had short-sighted. It took Alva's rash action, and subsequent repression, to push her off the force for good and into the ranks of fellow revolutionaries. LAWLOR was a place that she truly belonged, rather than serving among the ranks of those defending privilege.

Lizzy began training LAWLOR members to prepare them for direct action against Alva in the coming days. Meanwhile, sitting in his chair at the top of the Gunderson Steamworks Company Alva cackled. He cared little if Steamlandians supported him in his imminent invasion of Avalor. Although he hoped to convince the populace to be on his side, whether through speeches and various forms of propaganda, he doubted anyone could, or would, stop

his drive to war. What would come next would surprise him and, possibly, even knock him off his throne.

End Notes

As it should be obvious, this story is relatively critical of the police. I know not everyone will agree with that viewpoint, but I really don't care if they don't, because I think it is something that needs to be said with Black Lives Matter movement and people more critical of police now than ever. When thinking about the section in the sewer, I thought a little about the episodes of Futurama in the sewer and the "sewer mutants," but I wanted to display these people as more sophisticated, not affected by radioactive waste as they were. I used illustrations posted by Laurie Lascos, Dilara Aslan, Queen of Swords, Max Von Sama, NRA1447, Corey, fembruh's tophat, and the steampunk subreddit as inspiration for parts of the story. Used various pages, including Wikiquote, Wikipedia, Merriam-Webster, and others for definitions of words like "riot," "resistance movement," "rebellion," and "insurgency" along with pages 7-8 of Akinyele Omowale Umoja's We Will Shoot Back: Armed Resistance in the Mississippi Freedom Movement. Lawlor's statement at the end about archivists is paraphrased directly from the "SAA Core Values Statement and Code of Ethics." Thanks to some comments on Reddit, I had the idea to put every single paragraph of this story in the Hemingway editor to make my writing more concise.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!